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THE OPERATIONS OF THE AMERICAN
AIRBORNE FORCES IN SICILY
JULY 1943
(Non personal experience)

Type of operation described: AIRBORNE NIGHT ASSAULT
AND GROUND ACTION

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AIRBORNE OPERATIONS IN SICILY, JULY 1943.

INTRODUCTION

In January 1943, news broadcasts told us that a meeting of great import had taken place in Casablanca. President Roosevelt, Prime Minister Churchill, and the Combined Chiefs of Staff were present. (1)

Let us examine this meeting which took place a little over three months prior to the defeat of the Axis forces in Africa, and consider the situation as it existed and the plan that was made as a result of the situation.

The members present felt confident that the Axis would soon be defeated in North Africa. They therefore had to decide what would be done at the conclusion of that campaign. (2)

Russia had been requesting the establishment of a Second Front in Europe in order to divert German strength from the Russian sector.

"Axis control of the Mediterranean islands and the entire reach of the southern coast of Europe from Franco's Spain to Turkey denied our communications across the Mediterranean and forced our shipping into a 12,000 mile detour around the Cape of Good Hope. ----. The Chiefs of Staff therefore considered whether we had the strength to move directly to Italy or what might be the best intermediary^{1c} steps. It was decided to assault Sicily (operation HUSKY) and, with the approval of the Heads of State, General Eisenhower was advised on 23 January:

(1,2) A-1, p. 9.

'The Combined Chiefs of Staff have resolved that an attack against Sicily will be launched in 1943 with the target date as the period of the favorable July moon.'" (3) (see Map A)

GENERAL SITUATION

The Fifteenth Army Group was designated to make the attack against Sicily. (4) Included in this Group were the following:

British Eighth Army

American Seventh Army - consisting of:

included Task Force

3rd Infantry Division

A Combat Team of the 2d Armored Division

II Corps

1st Infantry Division

45th Infantry Division

82d Airborne Division (5)

The 82d Airborne Division arrived at Casablanca from the United States on 10 May, 1943, and soon departed for Oujda, French Morocco. There they made several training jumps, and started getting accustomed to the heat and dust of North Africa. (6) During their 6 weeks stay at Oujda, much night training was conducted --- "compass marches by small groups, organizing in the dark from simulated parachute drops and glider landings, moving across country at night and organizing positions, digging fox holes, laying wire, preparing mine fields ---." (7)

On 16 June the division began its move to Kairouan, Tunisia, 1000 miles distant. The last elements departed (3) A-1, p. 10; (4,5) A-1, p. 14; (6) A-2, p. 2; (7) A-2, p. 5.

from Oujda on 6 July. (8) For the men it was a grim reminder that they were getting closer to battle, for as they went along they could see the results of battles which had been won and lost and not very long ago.

Kairouan meant more definite and specific training. "Camouflage and dispersal were strictly enforced ---. Situation tents were set up --- daily conferences were held to discuss the division role in the pending attack ---." (9)

MISSIONS

Field Order #1 Seventh Army gave the following mission to the division.

(505CT)?

"(a) 82d Airborne Division (-Dets) concentrate rapidly by successive air lifts in Sicily, by D+7, in either or both the DIME (45th Infantry Division) or JOSS (3d Infantry Division) areas, as directed.

"(b) 2d Battalion, 509th Parachute Infantry, remain in North Africa in reserve, available for drop missions as directed." (10)

Field Order #6 II Corps gave the following mission to the 505th Combat Team, reinforced.

INND 505
DIRECT
CORPS CONTROL
"(1) Land during night D-1/D in area N and E of Gela, capture and secure high ground in that area. (2) Disrupt Communications and movement of reserves during night. (3) Be attached to 1st Infantry Division effective H+1 hours on D-Day. (4) Assist 1st Infantry Division in capturing and securing landing fields at Ponte Olivo." (11)

(8) A-2, p. 5; (9) A-2, p. 7; (10,11) A-3, p. 5.

ENEMY CAPABILITIES

"Against 82d Airborne Division (less 505 CT).

- (1) Attack the Division in assembly areas or on airfields in Tunisia, with fighters and bombers.
- (2) Attack the successive lifts of the Division by fighter and by AA while en route between Malta and the objective.
- (3) Attack the Division in assembly areas after unloading, by fighters and bombers and by long range artillery.

"Against 505 CT

- (1) Attack the CT while enroute between Malta and D.Z.'s.
- (2) Attack by local small patrols at D.Z.'s within 5 minutes of dropping.
- (3) Attack at D.Z.'s or enroute to objectives by Nuclei (40 men each) located at Gela, Niscemi and Ponte Olivo within 30 minutes after dropping.
- (4) Attack by field or coastal defense forces of an R.C.T. or larger.
 - (a) From the direction of Niscemi - within $3\frac{1}{2}$ hours after dropping.
 - (b) From the direction of Gela - within $3\frac{1}{2}$ hours after dropping.
 - (c) From the direction of Ponte Olivo - within 4 hours after dropping.
 - (d) From the direction of Biscari - within 5 hours after dropping." (12)

(12) A-4, pgs. 2,3.

ESTIMATED ENEMY STRENGTH AND DISTRIBUTIONS
SHOULD HAVE BEEN GIVEN ON A MAP

no map

THE 505TH COMBAT TEAM

The 505th Combat Team consisted of the following:

// 505th Parachute Infantry
3rd Battalion, 504th Parachute Infantry
456th Parachute Field Artillery Battalion
Company "B" 307th Airborne Engineer Battalion
Detachment, 82d Airborne Signal Company
Detachment, 307th Airborne Medical Company
Air Support Party
PWI Personnel " (13)

FINAL PLANS AND PREPARATIONS

In order to best carry out the missions assigned it, the 505th Combat Team planned to drop the 1st and 2d Battalions, 505th Parachute Infantry, Batteries A and B, 456th FA Battalion, and Regimental Headquarters --- "just north of an important road junction about seven miles east of GELA, attack and overcome an enemy strong point commanding the junction, and defend the junction against attack." (14) The 3rd Battalion, 505th Parachute Infantry along with Battery C, 456th FA Battalion was to --- "drop south of the same junction, and occupy the high ground overlooking it." (15) The 3rd Battalion, 504th Parachute Infantry was to --- "drop south of NISCEMI and establish and defend road blocks on the road from NISCEMI to the south". (16) A Demolition Section was to --- "prepare the demolition of rail and road crossings of the ACATE River". (17)

The Division Commander and assistants, went aboard the 7th Army Command ship on 4 July. This ship was to become a (13, 14, 15, 16, 17) A-3, p. 5.

part of the sea convoy to Sicily. (18)

Around 1600 on 9 July, 1943, the men of the 505th Combat Team ate supper and then went to the ten airfields around Kairouan in preparation for the take off. (19)

ON THE WAY

Between 2010 and 2116 on 9 July 226 C-47s (carrying the 505th Combat Team), took off from Kairouan and pointed toward Malta. (20) Each Battalion, plus Combat Team Headquarters had its own serial. (21)

SHOULD HAVE BEEN A - 1 / "SERIAL. Aircraft under one command and in one formation."
(22)

The plan was to fly to the northwest coast of Malta, then to the Sicilian mainland east of Gela, over Lake Di Bavarre, and finally over the drop zones. Scheduled time for the flight, to include air rendezvous in Africa, was 3 hours and 20 minutes. (23) (see Map B)

A high wind had been blowing that afternoon, but as the day went on the wind seemed to subside. This wind, coming from the northwest, was strong enough to affect the flight of the planes. The wind velocity was between 20 - 30 miles an hour. (24) Had this been only an airborne invasion, this wind velocity could have delayed the takeoff, but the ship convoy was by now well on its way toward Sicily. The airborne phase therefore had to go ahead as per plan.

The effect of the wind was immediate. Most of the planes did not sight Malta, a landmark along their planned route of flight. (see Map B) This island should have been sighted as the planes were flying low enough; they had to fly low for tactical reasons. But the combination of wind, poor visibility (18, 19, 20) A-3, [✓]p. 6; (21) A-3, [✓]p. 28; (22) A-4, p. 2; (23) A-3, [✓]p. 6; (24) A-3, [✓]p. 28.

and the complete lack of communications between planes and between plane, and ground, (seems to have ^{threw} thrown) the planes well off their planned course. (25)

THE FIRST JUMP ON SICILY

As D day came into being, the spearhead of the 82d Airborne invasion of Sicily was somewhere over the Mediterranean and very near the southeastern coast of Sicily. Following, as closely as possible, the scheduled time of flight of 3 hours and 20 minutes; all those jumping had jumped by 0030. (26)

*MAP SHOWS
BN DROPPED
NEAR NISCEMI*
The 3d Battalion, 504th Parachute Infantry landed "scattered over an area approximately 60 miles wide, southeast and east of Niscemi to ^{NOT SHOWN} Pachino in the southeast tip of the island." (27)
(see Map C)

The 1st Battalion, 505th Parachute Infantry, landed with 23 of its 38 plane loads near ^{NOT SHOWN} Noto, in the British Eighth Army area. (28) The remainder of the battalion landed "approximately 4 miles south of Niscemi." (29) The two geographical groups were then separated by about 43 miles. (see Map C)

The 2d Battalion, 505th Parachute Infantry landed in 3 generalized groups. I Company landed on its scheduled drop zone. It was the only unit of the combat team that did. G Company landed in an area approximately $1\frac{1}{2}$ miles long by $\frac{3}{4}$ miles wide. This area was about $1\frac{3}{4}$ miles northeast of the (25,26) A-3, p. 6; (27) A-3, p. 33; (28) A-5, p. 6; (29) A-3, p. 22; (30) A-5, p. 12.

Gela-Vittoria bridge over the ~~A~~cate River and on the Gela side of the river. This drop put them 5 miles from their planned drop zone. The remaining units of the battalion dropped in an area about 3 miles long and 1 mile wide. The long axis of the zone paralleled the coastline, going inland from the coast at Scoglitti 1 mile. 13 miles had to be covered before their assigned drop zone was reached. (31) (see Map C)

ONLY THE
CONCLUSIONS
SHOULD HAVE
BEEN PLACED IN
THE NARRATION.
THE DISCUSSION
AND JUSTIFICATION
SHOULD HAVE
BEEN A
FOOTNOTE

No source has been found by the author which lists or shows separate landing areas for Batteries A,B,C, 456th Parachute Field Artillery Battalion. One source shows a landing area for the battalion. Inasmuch as a battery flew with each battalion of the 505th Parachute Infantry, I feel sure that the batteries did not land together. However, as only one source shows any landing for the artillery battalion, this source will be followed. The aforementioned source shows that the battalion landed about 5 miles directly south of Vittoria; 16 miles off the drop zone. (32) (see Map C)

Headquarters and Command Group, 505th Parachute Infantry, landed in an area about $4\frac{1}{2}$ miles south of Vittoria. (33)
19 miles separated them from the drop zone.

One planeload of 1st Platoon men of B Company, 307th Engineers, was forced down before having cleared North Africa. The load flew on to Sicily alone and dropped at 0022, 5 miles directly south of Vittoria. (34)

SEE
NOTE
ABOVE

The only source material found which mentions a drop location for the remainder of B Company states that they landed 15 miles northeast of the scheduled drop zone. (35)

(31,32,33) A-5, p. 12; (34,35) A-3, p. 24.

It is the writer's belief that this is incorrect. I think that the engineers landed about 5 miles east-southeast of the drop zone. My reasons for thinking this are two: the engineers, while assembling on the ground, met elements of A Company which had landed about 2 miles southeast of their drop zone, and the engineers also contacted elements of G Company, which landed $5\frac{1}{2}$ miles southeast of the drop zone.

GROUND ACTION

As a result of the widespread drop of the combat team, the 3d Battalion, 504th, was $17\frac{1}{2}$ miles from the Headquarters and Command Group of the combat team. The closest element of the 1st Battalion (G Company) was 13 miles away. The 3d Battalion, 505th, was 5 miles distant, and the 2d Battalion, 505th, was 2 miles away. The artillery and the engineers were in the general vicinity. 23 plane loads of the combat team were 33 miles away, and in the British sector of responsibility. (36)

The men of the 3d Battalion, 504th, set up defensive positions near and along the roads running from Niscemi to Biscari, and also along the roads running south and southwest toward Gela. Enemy movement along these roads was brought under fire. Many times initial fires were enough to not only delay the enemy, but also to halt him. In some cases the initial fires made him retreat to the north and therefore away from the Allied amphibious landing area of Sicily. (37) The men who landed in the British sector were surrounded by the enemy. A Canadian Patrol was met about 0730, 10 July, and from it they learned their location. (38) After having gone to the beach for aid, a garrison was taken. "One Italian officer and 20 enlisted men were captured, and 6 paratroopers (36) A-5, p. 12; (37) A-5, pgs. 13,14; (38) A-3, p. 36.

were released,-----." (39) A search was continued for more men. That night the group pulled out to the beach where they stayed. (40) No contact was made with the Combat Team Headquarters on D day. (41)

The 1st Battalion, 505th, jumped into small arms fire.

040 IS
BEING
QUOTE
SAYRE?
WANT
"By 0230 I had assembled 15 men from the company and contacted the battalion executive officer. Company A was to attack a point from which about 4 machine guns were firing. We first attacked at 0300. The point from which the machine guns were firing was a garrison surrounded by pillboxes and was pretty strong. The attack was held up until about 0530, at which time 50 more men were assembled. The attack was resumed and the garrison was killed or captured by 0615. It was held by 100 Italians, with German noncoms from the Hermann Goring Panzer Division. We could hear a lot of fire in the valley---up toward Niscemi and down toward the beach. At about 1630, Lieutenant Colonel Gorham, the battalion commander, arrived with about 30 troopers from headquarters. He ordered us to consolidate our position, since it commanded the road leading from Niscemi to the beaches."

"At about 0700, a German armored column was seen about 4,000 yards away, coming from Niscemi. It was preceded by a point of 2 motorcycles and a Volkswagen.⁷ We let the point come into our position and then killed or captured the men. The armored column stopped about 3,000 yards away when the point was fired upon. Our position was then attacked from the front by 2 companies of Germans. We let them approach to within 100 yards (39,40) A-3, p. 36; (41) author's deduction after inspection of available reports.

Not for mof
and then pinned them down in the open ground. Most of them were killed or captured. At the same time, tanks hit us from the flank. 2 of 6 attacking tanks were knocked out and 2 more were damaged by a bazooka squad. The tanks withdrew. During this fight, Colonel Gorham sent patrols to the high ground which was the regimental objective, and to the 'Y'. They reported about 30 Italians in pillboxes surrounded by barbed wire. There was no one on the high ground."

"Colonel Gorham moved our force to the high ground, using about 50 prisoners to carry the wounded."

"After we had organized on the objectives, a large part of our force moved out to capture strong point 'Y' leaving about a squad and 1 officer to cover us from the north. When about 400 yards from the strong point, heavy naval gunfire was seen falling about 100 yards north of the pillboxes, but it could not reach the pillboxes which were in defilade. One of our Italian prisoners was told to go to the pillboxes and ask for their surrender. The occupants were told that if they did not surrender we would bring the naval gunfire right down on the pillboxes. We didn't have any communication with the Navy, but the men in the pillboxes didn't know that and surrendered. Our men moved into the pillboxes at about 1045."

"A few minutes later, 4 German tanks approached from the north. When troopers in the pillboxes fired on them, they withdrew. At 1130, scouts from the 2d Battalion of the 16th Infantry, 1st Division, contacted us at strong point 'Y'. Colonel Gorham then attached all of our troops to the 16th Infantry and we advanced to the north. Shortly after this I A

(CAPT SAITRE)

talked to Major General Ridgway by telephone and reported that the regiment had accomplished its mission capturing strong point 'Y' and seizing the high ground northwest of it." (42)

At about 1900 that night the battalion fighting with the 16th Infantry halted about 1 mile north of the crossroad. (43)

Although General Ridgway had been contacted by phone, no contact had been made with the combat team commander. (44)

In its landing area just east of S. Croce Camerina, and 20 miles from the scheduled drop zone, the 2d Battalion, 505th, comparatively speaking, accomplished a rapid reorganization. The battalions having landed in an area $2\frac{1}{2}$ miles long and 1 mile wide, greatly aided this reorganization. (45)

"At 0900 ---, the battalion began to clean up the strong point and the area near S. Croce Camerina." (46) When this had been accomplished, the battalion with E Company as advance guard, moved its position from east of the city toward the south, and the southern coast of Sicily, which at that time was about 3 miles away. (47) A defensive position was established "on the outskirts of S. Croce Camerina overlooking the sea". (48)

During this time, patrols were sent out to contact the men still missing. By 1200, with the exception of those men already killed, wounded, or injured in the jump, the battalion had collected all its men. (49)

While acting as advance guard, E Company received fire from S. Croce Camerina. It attacked, took the city, and captured "144 Italians, one 47 mm anti-tank gun, 13,000 rounds of machine gun ammunition, 330 grenades and enough rifles and

(42, 43) A-5, p. 8; (44) A-3, p. 13; (45) A-5, p. 12;

(46, 47, 48, 49, 50, 51) A-3, p. 23.

carbines and equipment to equip an Italian Battalion". (50)
By dark the battalion had also taken a ---"strongly held point
east of S. Croce Camerina". (51)

2nd Platoon
I Company of the 3d Battalion, 505th, ---"had the mission
of establishing patrol and radio contact with the assault
elements of the 16th Infantry. It was also to light a large
bonfire at one end of the lake as a signal for the amphibious
troops." "A house and haystack were set afire as the signal."
(52) I Company contacted elements of the 16th Infantry
around 0600. (53)

*Abrupt
change
of direction*
G Company organized quickly and moved toward the south
to reach the bridge crossing of the Acate River. In this
area they joined the 180th Infantry, 45th Division, and fought
with them. (54)

During the morning hours of darkness the remainder of the
3d Battalion sent out patrols and was subjected to local fight-
ing. "Sixty men of the battalion, with the aid of 3 guns, C
Battery, 456th Field Artillery, were the first troops into
Vittoria." (55) After convincing the Italian defenders of
the outcome if they continued their resistance, the Italian
Commander surrendered his force. (56)

WHERE?
One planeload of the 1st Platoon of Company B, 307th
Battalion, met elements of the 3d Battalion, 505th and 180th
Infantry. (57) The majority of the 1st Platoon worked with
elements of A Company, 505th Infantry. In the afternoon they
met the 2d Battalion, 180th Infantry, 45th Division, and
remained with this unit. (58)

(50,51) A-3, p. 23; (52,53) A-5, p. 14; (54,55,56) A-3, p. 23;
(57,58) A-3, p. 24.

2 The 2d and 3d Platoons contacted elements of the Combat Team Headquarters "at dawn about 4 miles northwest of the drop zone". (59) A patrol that had been sent out was driven from a crossroads strengthened by pillboxes. This was accomplished by the arrival of enemy tanks. (60) A defensive position was then set up on the summit of 2 small hills, in order to resist further attack. (61)

"At about 1530 one battery of the 288th Italian Field Artillery Battalion approached the hill on which the defensive position was located. The entire battery was captured,----." (62) After "turning over their prisoners to the 45th Division", they returned to their original landing area. (63)

The 456th Field Artillery Battalion made small engagements against the enemy. Artillery support was given a group of men from the 3d Battalion, 505th, by 3 guns from C Battery. The combination of Infantry and Artillery fire enabled the group to enter Vittoria. (64)

Just before dawn, organization resulted in gathering small groups of men together as the Headquarters and Command Group of the 505th Combat Team pushed toward its objective. (65)

The Combat Team Commander had no contact with the Division Commander, nor did he have contact with the 3d Battalion, 504th Infantry; the 1st Battalion, 2d Battalion, and 3d Battalion of the 505th Infantry. (66)

This is what the Combat Team Commander has to say: "Up to this point, just before daylight, we had seen no familiar landmarks and we weren't sure whether or not we were actually (59,60,61,62,63) A-3, p. 24; (64) A-3, p. 23; (65) A-3, p. 22; (66) Author's conclusion after inspecting source material.

in Sicily. Just before daylight heavy naval shelling opened up to the west and south. We were happy to see it, since it proved at least that we were actually in Sicily. Based upon the location of the shelling and my knowledge of the naval support plan, we started west at once." (67)

General Ridgway arrived in Sicily on the morning of D day. His only contact was with Company "I" of the 505th Infantry. Through the 2d Battalion, 16th Infantry, he learned the whereabouts of Company "A" of the same regiment. Out of a Regimental Combat Team, General Ridgway knew the location of only 2 companies and had contact with only 1 of them. (68)

D/1

Along the Vittoria-Gela highway, a few miles west of Vittoria, the Combat Team Commander met his first major subordinate unit; the 3rd Battalion of the 505th Infantry. (69) It was ordered to advance to the west.

The action that took place on this day at Biazzo Ridge is the only important combat action participated in by any major portion of the 505th Combat Team while under the direct command of the Combat Team Commander. (see Map C)

The following words are those of the Combat Team Commander.

↓
"About a mile short of the ridge some soldiers of the 45th Division stopped me and said that the Germans held the road ahead---. The situation looked about just right to take them on, since we now had about two hundred and fifty paratroopers, so we continued our march. ----large German forces were apparently astride the Gela-Vittoria road and moving in strength from Biscari to Vittoria. We could hear a great deal of firing.
(67) A-5, p. 10; (68) A-3, p. 13; (69) A-5, p. 10.

Since the road had to be opened to the 1st Division, where we hoped the rest of the 505th Combat Team was engaged, we continued our advance. German forces occupied the ridge and placed heavy small arms fire on our leading elements. The Germans soon were driven off the ridge, which then was occupied by a platoon of Company B of the 307th Airborne Engineer Battalion.

"Our entire force,---, attacked toward the Acate River, in the face of intense fire. The Germans reacted so violently that they counterattacked at noon with about 6 Mark VI tanks. These overran the assaults of the parachute force and penetrated as far as the Combat Team CP, just over the top of the ridge. A staff officer dispatched to General Bradley's II Corps Headquarters obtained a liaison party from a 155 Battalion (189th Field Artillery), also a company of Sherman tanks and a Navy artillery support party. At 1600 the Navy and the 155s fired on the Germans and quieted them down. -----.

"German prisoners all said that their force consisted of a battle group from the Hermann Goring Panzer Division that was moving from Biscari toward Vittoria together with another group moving from Niscemi to Gela. ----.

"As a final effort on this day we planned an attack to jump off at 2030, in which we would use every available man, clerks, runners and what not, this attack supported by the company of Sherman tanks which had just arrived. The attack jumped off on schedule and completely overran the German positions, capturing one Mark VI tank complete and destroying three others which were abandoned by the Germans during the night on the road to Biscari. ---. By 2200 we had consolidated our gains---." (70)

(70) A-5, pgs. 11,12.

After consolidating, the Combat Team Commander held his forces in the vicinity of Biazzo Ridge, and awaited the coming of daylight. (71)

at camp station
The 3d Battalion, 504th, the 1st Battalion, 505th, the 2d Battalion, 505th, and a portion of the Headquarters Group did not take part in the action of Biazzo Ridge.

myt
In the 3d Battalion, 504th area, the men continued fighting to gain the area containing their assigned drop zone. Upon reaching the zone, they dug in defensive positions and waited for the arrival of the remainder of the combat team. (72)

The 1st Battalion, 505th, continued the fight which had begun on D day. *S*

On D/1 an attack was launched at dawn. (73) "---its *where* objective being a hill to its immediate front. About 1 hour after the hill was taken, a strong German counterattack, consisting of about a battalion of infantry and about 20 tanks, hit our position. When it looked like the tanks would overrun us, a number of the men moved back. We drove the German infantry off, but the tanks managed to get through us." (74)

3 { Having learned the whereabouts of the combat team, the 2d Battalion, 505th, marched through S. Croce Camerina and Vittoria. (75) The combat team was not met on D/1.

Regimental Headquarters Company, 505th, arrived at Biazzo Ridge on D/1 at about 2000. (76) With them were also additional men from the engineers. (77) This addition in manpower (71) A-5, p. 12; (72) A-3, p. 31; (73,74) A-5, p. 8; (75) A-3, p. 30; (76,77) A-3, p. 26.

10/1/47
plus the arrival of a company of tanks enabled the combat team commander to make a counterattack against the enemy on the evening of D+1. (78)

It is interesting to note that the Demolition Group which was supposed to have prepared --- "the demolition of rail and road crossings of the Acate River", (79) landed south of Syracuse, 65 miles from their objective. (80)

General Ridgway was unable to make contact with the 505th Combat Team on D+1. That morning he sent word that the 504th Combat Team (-) should be flown to Sicily that evening. (81)

NS. EFFICIENT
OVERAGE
P. 204
3-22-1975
"A message was sent Seventh Army requesting notification of all friendly troops, and one to Division Rear to apprise the Wing of the great dispersion of the 505th." (82)

To further prepare for the arrival of the 504th Combat Team a Division CP was set up "about 3 miles southeast of Gela and 1 mile from the coast". (83) (see Map C) *not on map C.*

That night 144 C-47's carrying the 504th combat team left Africa for Farello landing field, the scheduled drop zone. (84) The weather was good, messages had been sent stating that airborne troops were jumping, not into enemy territory, but into an area beyond which our ground troops had already advanced. (85)

not in sequence
As the planes neared Gela, either a .50 caliber machine gun located on the sand at Lake Di Bavarre or a gun from a naval craft, both friendly, first opened fire on the flight. Just prior to the arrival of these planes, enemy planes had made a sweep over this general area. Feeling that this too was
(78) A-3, p. 26; (79) A-3, p. 5; (80) A-3, p. 31;
(81) A-3, p. 13; (82,83,84,85) A-3, p. 13.

the enemy, our force had opened fire on the planes. Twenty-three of the 144 planes were knocked down. Fortunately the men in only 6 of the 23 planes were not able to jump. The planes that weren't hit were scattered all over the southeastern portion of Sicily. The dispersion was equally as bad as it had been for the 505th Combat Team. (86)

Very abrupt
D/2

The units in the vicinity of Biazzo Ridge spent the day burying the dead, "and salvaging of enemy and our own equipment and reorganization". (87)

The 2d Battalion 505th joined the Combat Team that morning. (88)

One 3rd Battalion group of the 504th, while still with a Battalion of the 180th Infantry, became aware of the location of the Battalion CP and moved to the CP in the vicinity of Gela. Another group, in the British sector, left that area by crash boat to be returned to their unit. (89)

The 1st Battalion 505th was still engaged with the enemy in the vicinity of Niscemi.

who? "----we again attacked toward Niscemi and again, at about 0900, the Germans counterattacked, using several Mark VI tanks plus some Mark IVs. We had good artillery support from the 1st Division and the tanks were finally stopped about one hundred yards from our position." (90)

How far? this is a long way
The portion of the Battalion that had landed in the Eighth Army area started moving toward Gela.

(86) A-3, p. 37; (87) A-3, p. 31; (88) A-3, p. 30;

(89) A-3, p. 36; (90) A-5, p. 8.

At Noto the British informed them that they were to be evacuated to Kairouan. During their return to Kairouan they escorted prisoners of war that had been captured in Sicily. (91)

which day?
On this day the 505th Combat Team consisted of the following:

3d Battalion 505th

2d Battalion 505th

456th Field Artillery Battalion

Headquarters and Command Group

Company B 307th Engineers

Still missing were the 1st Battalion, 505th, and the 3d Battalion 504th.

Two days after the initial jump into Sicily, General Ridgway had to submit this report:

"No formed element of Combat Team 505 under my control. Expect some today based on 1st Division reports. Elements of Combat Team 504 dribbling in. At present one battery 75 pack howitzer and equivalent of one infantry company available for use---. Am concentrating all efforts on reorganization." (92)

At the end of this day the 504th Combat Team could report only "37 officers and 518 men", present. (93)

D/3

The 505th Combat Team again spent the day in the burial of the dead, the salvaging of equipment and in reorganization. (94) It had lost 43 killed and 100 wounded in this action. (95)

which day?
contact how many

The 1st Battalion, 505th, contacted the 505th Combat Team and under its orders assembled and waited for its arrival. (96)

(91) A-3, p. 29; (92,93) A-3, p. 13; (94) A-3, p. 31;

(95) A-3, p. 12; (96) A-3, p. 29.

where?

Fierce fighting was still going on around Niscemi between elements of the 3d Battalion, 504th, and the enemy. In one engagement against enemy infantry and tanks, 75 enemy and 5 3d Battalion men were killed. (97)

which day? On this day, the 505th Combat Team Commander had contact with all of his elements with the exception of the 3d Battalion 504th. This was also the first day that the Commanding General of the 82d Airborne Division had control over the major portion of this combat team. (98)

The 505th Combat Team Commander "reached the Division CP July 13 at 0900, and confirmed the location of 1200 troops under his command." (99)

The Division CP was moved "two miles north to a point near Highway 115". (100) (see Map C) Assembly areas for the 504th and 505th Combat Teams were set up near by. The 505th CT moved into this new assembly area. In the 504th area men continued to drift in. The total Division strength on this day was 3024. (101)

D/4

Men continued to show up in the areas of the 504th and 505th Combat Teams.

The elements of the 3d Battalion, 504th, which had fought so well in the vicinity of Niscemi joined the 504th Combat Team in its assembly area.

Total strength that day was listed as 3790. (102)

D/5

Seventh Army directed that "the 82d Airborne Division (97) A-3, p. 34; (98) author's deduction after inspection of available reports; (99,100,101,102) A-3, p. 13.

assemble with attached troops in the Palma Di Montechiaro area, to relieve elements of the 3d Division in that area by dark, July 19th, and to be prepared to advance west". (103) (see Map D)

A request was made for the movement of the Third Lift from Africa to Sicily. (104)

D/6

Provisional Corps issued the Division "twenty-four $2\frac{1}{2}$ ton trucks and seven $\frac{1}{4}$ ton trucks, ---". (105) The 39th Combat Team issued the Division "eighty-three $2\frac{1}{2}$ and $3/4$ ton trucks ---." (106) The combat team trucks were only to be used for the move from Gela to Palma Di Montechiaro. (107) (see Map D)

The Third Lift, consisting of the following, was flown to Sicily. (108)

Headquarters and Headquarters Company 82d A/B Division
Headquarters and Headquarters Battery 82d Div. Artillery
82d A/B Signal Company (-)

Advance Detachment 782d A/B Ordnance Maint. Company

Advance Detachment 407th A/B Quartermaster Company

Advance Detachment 307th A/B Engineer Battalion

Advance Detachment 307th A/B Medical Company (109)

This lift arrived at Sicily without mishap. (110)

when

(103) A-3, p. 14; (104) A-3, p. 13; (105,106,107) A-3, p. 14;
(108) A-3, p. 13; (109) A-6, p. 2; (110) A-3, p. 13.

ADVANCE TO THE WEST

From 17 July to 24 July, the Division made a rapid advance along the southern coast of Sicily from Gela to Mazara and then advanced to the north in a move which culminated in the occupation of the northwest sector of Sicily, namely around Trapani, Castellamare, and Alcamo.

(111) (see Map D) The advance from Gela to Sciacca was spearheaded by the 504th Combat Team. The 505th Combat Team acted as right flank and rear guard for this advance.

(112) At Sciacca the 2d Battalion, 504th CT followed the road leaving Sciacca and going northward. The remainder of the Combat Team continued westward toward Menfi. The 505th Combat Team relieved the 504th Combat Team just beyond Sciacca.

(113) On 23 July the Division was ordered to "move without delay to seize Trapani and that portion of Sicily west of line Castellamare - Mazara". (114) At this time a Task Force made up of an infantry Combat Team, a battalion of field artillery and three Reconnaissance Battalions was attached to the division. (115) Utilizing this force, orders were issued for the accomplishment of the assigned mission.

(116) By 23 July (D/14), patrols of the attached force were met west of Trapani. (117) "Nothing remained but to police the occupied area and garrison it --- ." (118)

(111) A-3, pgs. 15, 16, 17; (112) A-3 pgs. 15, 16; (113) A-3, p. 16; (114) A-3, p. 17; (115) A-3, p. 17; (116) A-3, p. 17; (117) A-3, p. 17; (118) A-3, p. 17.

ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM

The basic plan for the use of the 82d Airborne Division was sound. The missions assigned it were very good ones for an airborne division and also very important ones for the Seventh Army. But a plan is no better than the coordination achieved prior to the accomplishment of the mission as well as in the actual accomplishment of the mission itself. } 2

In this respect, there was a definite lack of consideration given to the airborne phase of the Sicilian campaign by the Navy, the Air Corps, and the Army. (119) These major parts of our military service seem to have been only concerned with their own immediate objectives. (120) To transport the elements of the Division to Sicily, the Air Corps used pilots which up to the time of this transport had been occupied in flying supplies over friendly ground. (121) They were therefore not qualified to participate in a night combat flight. The Navy had a policy of firing upon any aircraft which was in the vicinity of their ships. (122) In this way they put the burden of identification upon the Air Corps. The Army, acting as overall headquarters for this operation, failed to see that these conflicts were ironed out. They could have done this themselves or appointed a coordinating head (not an advisor) for the airborne operation. This head could then have coordinated the various all important differences and deficiencies of and within the services. } 2

The final approval of the operation came but one day before the first airborne assault took place. (123) As a result, information that should have been disseminated to all troops (119,120,121,122,123) A-7.

involved in the Sicilian campaign was not made known to them. Paratroopers were shot by friendly forces because these forces in some instances didn't know that a friendly airborne assault was a part of the scheme of attack. (124) Other paratroopers were shot because their jump suits had never been seen before. (125) Still others were shot because the password that they knew was not the one then in use. (126)

would this have changed the walking?
Had the airborne drop zones been further inland they would have met less enemy resistance, and the convergence of air and sea routes, (as they existed in the vicinity of Gela), would have been greatly decreased. Perhaps separate lanes of travel could then have been followed, with the possibility of planes flying over ships being completely eliminated.

The men of the 82d Airborne Division should be highly praised for their actions. Though they were dropped in scattered groups throughout southeastern Sicily, and though 50% of their second lift was damaged and 23 planes shot down, these men fought where ever they landed whether it was on the drop zone or 60 miles from it.

not fought out of it
It is said that their actions advanced the successful beach landings of the Seventh Army by 2 days. (127)

↓
2100 00076
General Student, commander of the German airborne operation on Crete and an authority on airborne operations, had this to say of their worth: "The Allied airborne operation in Sicily was decisive despite widely scattered drops which must be expected in a night landing. It is my opinion that if it (124) A-7; (125) A-8, p. 5; (126,127) A-7.

sent to my wing. This is a good idea. I am a decent flier off (although German).

had it not been for the Allied airborne forces blocking the Hermann Goering Armored Division from reaching the beach-head, that division would have driven the initial seaborne forces back into the sea. I attribute the entire success of the Allied Sicilian operation to the delaying of German reserves until sufficient forces had been landed by sea to resist the counterattacks by our defending forces (the strength of which had been held in mobile reserve)." (128)

LESSONS

1. Any airborne operation is a highly specialized one.
2. Airborne operations should be planned well in advance.
3. In a combined operation teamwork is essential.
4. In order to achieve success in battle, all troops participating must be fully qualified to carry out their assigned tasks.
5. In a combined operation, characteristics peculiar to any part of the force participating must be made known to all parts of the force.
6. Once an order is issued, it must be checked upon to see that it is being carried out.
7. In a combined operation coordination for all phases of the action must be carried out at the topmost level.
8. An airborne assault, if properly planned and executed, ~~can greatly assist ground units in achieving their missions.~~
9. In any operation, lack of prior planning and coordination can spell disaster.

(128) A-5, p. 16.

Review
needed

10. The transporting of airborne troops in combat is an Air Force responsibility. It cannot be neglected.
11. A properly trained soldier, under the most adverse circumstances, can by knowledge, fortitude and stamina, achieve his mission and turn possible defeat into success. (129)

(128)⁹ The lessons are my own deductions after reading the sources listed in the bibliography.